COUNSELING INNER CITY ADULTS TO START HIGHER EDUCATION

This chapter will attempt to deal with the problem of motivating city adults to start higher education. The views presented will be drawn mostly from my personal experiences during my ten year involvement with this problem in the city of Newark, New Jersey. The topic will be treated in a general way, presenting a panoramic view of the problem. We will define our concept of what the inner city is. We will present profiles of the adults who reside in the inner city; the ones who constitute the target population. For the purpose of determining its relevancy to the needs of the inner city and its residents, we will examine some of the main characteristics of higher education. Finally, on the basis of our analysis of the needs of the inner city residents, we will suggest changes and approaches designed to make higher education <u>available</u> and desirable to the inner city resident. Without the dual characteristics of availability and desirability (from the inner city resident's perspective) it would be impossible to motivate the inner city adult to pursue a college education.

<u>The Inner City</u>

In spite of shared characteristics, each inner city has its own unique personality and it is not premature to state that college counselors interested in serving the inner city should study and understand the personality of their particular inner city.

The inner city is old. It claims seniority over its neighboring suburbs. It achieved "city status" over neighboring contemporaries that maintained "town status."

Suburbia and highways girdle the inner city. To its center suburbanites are funneled in the morning traffic rush and trickled out in the evening traffic rush. During the working hours the inner city hosts the rich, the powerful, the intellectual, the upward moving middle class. To many suburbanites the inner city is a necessary daytime nightmare that makes possible their pleasant night and weekend dreams. The orientation of many suburbanites is that the inner city exists for the convenience of the suburbs; a sort of a necessary nuisance.

For the most part, the inner city residents are a conglomerate of public housing tenants, welfare recipients, underemployed, and miseducated Americans, discriminated-against second-class citizens, slum dwellers and senior citizens.

High density of people and low density of services are the equation of the inner city. Services are traditionally administered by institutions. For multiple reasons (lack of concern for the inner city resident seems to constantly be at the top of the list) institutions have not served the inner city residents. It is common for the inner city resident to view institutions with hostility and distrust.

The community spirit is found in very small geographical areas: a block, a floor of a building, a tenement, etc., rather than in larger geographical entities such as school districts, political districts, etc. At times the community spirit is divorced from a geographical area. It is found in churches, ethnic clubs or organizations. Often the community spirit is killed or not allowed to flourish by the harsh demands of the daily struggle for survival.

The inner city is polluted, abundant in old and new slums, torn by the urban renewal bulldozer, bankrupt by a dwindling tax base, burning with racial conflict, ridden with crimes... and so the litany of negation continues.

For all its misery, the inner city is abundant in potential. It is essential to the survival and well-being of America. The inner city still holds the nerve center of industry, still houses great institutions of higher education and still remains as a center of cultural enrichment. Perhaps of greatest importance, the inner city holds the greatest challenge and opportunity for America. The challenge is to stop and then reverse the trend of human deterioration so evident in the inner city lest, like the drug problem, it sprawls outward to the whole country. The opportunity: can we free the unused talent; the natural resources present in the inner city resident? In relation to our specific topic in this chapter; can higher education become a significant agent, geared to meet the challenge? Can higher education help liberate the unused talent, the natural resources of the inner city?

Profiles of Inner City Residents

Earlier we stated that we will draw, for the writing of this chapter, on our personal experiences in spite of the limitations that are inherent in such an approach. We also stated that each inner city has its own unique personality and suggested that the reader take time to study and understand the personality of their particular city. The preceding sentences are our way of explaining the incompleteness of our presented profiles and the obvious omissions that might have been made.

In attempting to present inner city resident profiles we recognise the danger of stereotyping. In spite of this danger, we believe that there is validity in drawing pictures that represent recognisable clusters of inner city residents that we have come to know. The pictures, due to their very nature, leave out individual differences.

Blacks

The overriding consideration and characteristic of this group is blackness. Being a Black in the American experience is a characteristic that transcends any individual trait that the members of this group might or might not have. Blackness translates itself: to being abused; to be the victim of violence; to lack opportunity: to know more of what should be an individual's share of hate: to mistrust as a reflex and to never dare to hope. The talks of significant change in the realities of a lack man's life which we outlined above, are more myth than facts. Although it is better disguised today, the emphasis is still to make blacks white as a pre-condition to acceptance. The black man knows intuitively what the researcher must utilise all the tools of his science to find out, i.e., the rate of unemployment of young black men is the same among high school graduates and non-graduates. To the Blacks, "Black Power" is a goal to achieve rather than a present reality. To most Blacks, the institutions of higher education are either highest in the herarchy of schools which force their "dropping out" and/or powerful wheels in the urban renewal bulldozer which evicts them.

Puerto Ricans

Color them poor with hues of blackness. The Puerto Ricans are denied the right to be what they are, i.e., Puerto Ricans. Different from white and black, they are constantly forced to identify themselves in American racist terms; that is, as either black or white. If he resists, the Puerto Rican finds himself in conflict and rejected by both black and white. Abuse, victimization, violence, lack of opportunity, mistrust, hopelessness and self-hate repeat themselves as a ditto copy of the black reality. In cities where the Puerto Ricans and blacks share the misery, the Puerto Ricans are still lower men on the totem pole.

Often Puerto Ricans are de-personalized by lumping them in compartments labeled "Spanish speaking" or "Black" or "Latins". This labeling occurs frequently when programmatic interventions, fantasized to meet the needs of the Puerto Ricans as an annex to other group needs are invented. The results have been that when this approach is used, the other groups are served and the Puerto Ricans are not.

We will dare to state, that the most evident and constant characteristic of the Puerto Rican is his reluctance to commit cultural suicide or yield to cultural genocide.

Inner City Whites

Often the white left in the inner city are the "enforcement troops" of other white racism. They are trained to believe that their shaky financial position is the result of Black inadequacies or Black Power cries that command preferential treatment of Blacks at the inner city is white expense. Their black paranoia is re-enforced by their physical proximity to non-whites. Their escape to the suburbs has

been prevented by life circumstances. Their status is, therefore, dependent on how successful they are in retaining power and control over non-whites. They have been alienated by liberal white America, whom they hate and distrust with the same passion with which they hate and distrust Blacks. The educational level is often below high school and seldom does it go beyond a high school diploma. This group views institutions of higher education with distrust, hate or indifference.

These whites live in lower-middle and middle-class ghettos. They have a virtual monopoly of white and blue collar positions. Through unions and associations, they successfully enforce the "no Blacks-no Puerto Ricans" policy. They are looked upon as a powerful political force even in cities where they are numerically outnumbered by non-whites.

Senior Citizens

Many social security recipients depend exclusively or predominately on their social security benefits. These social security dependents often constitute another kind of inner city resident. Predominant realities in their lives are fear and loneliness. Closeted and isolated they seem to mark time just waiting for the end. If white, they live in integrated public housing units, or in deteriorating housing adjacent to the black ghetto. If Black, they usually live in the worst housing in the ghetto. Although motivating this group of senior citizens to start college seems to be impractical from many points of reference, the universities must try to be relevant to these groups also in their adult education non-degree programs.

We are aware that in different geographical areas of the United States Mexican-Americans, Oriental Americans, descendants of different nations, American-Indians, and other repressed minorities are concentrated in inner cities. We are not qualified, from an experiencial point of view, to attempt to draw valid sketches about these groups.

Main Characteristics of Higher Education in Relation to the Needs of Inner City Adults

There is consensus that higher education needs to change if it is to meet the needs of inner city adults. The awareness of the need for change has brought about a great deal of talk about change, but little significant action. In fact, the most prevalent characteristic of higher education is its resistance to change. The prevailing view in higher education circles is still that which was voiced by S. I. Hayakawa: (higher education is) "a sanctuary for debate and scholarship uninterrupted by secular problems." A study of university and college faculty attitudes by David Borland reported that faculty satisfaction is predominant in our institutions of higher education. Faculty satisfaction with the status quo acts as a deterrent to change.

Grade credits, standard and non-standard tests, required courses and pre-requisites, are still the every-day practice of higher education, be it at the university or community college. These practices provide a solid fence designed to keep the inner city resident out.

Higher education has been "a melting pot" par excellence. To the institutions of higher education, immigrants in the past have gone to achieve "final integration." A large portion of the inner city residents (Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Mexican-Americans, American Indians,

Oriental-Americans, etc.) are rejecting the melting pot theory. These groups are promoting a new form of integration based on cultural plurality; an integration that reinforces cultural or ethnic identity.

The student personnel profession is tied to a tradition of passivity. They are forced to wait inside the office walls, during the office hours, for someone already motivated to come and ask for encouragement to do what they have already decided they were going to do. The concept of "aggressive casework" could be effectively borrowed by personnel workers. Succinctly, aggressive casework is a methodology of helping people who do not seek help but could use it. The professional seeks out the potential client, and "sells" his service. This approach comes in direct conflict with some "sacred practices" of the "helping" professions. The acceptance of such an approach in college personnel work will require a basic about-face in attitudes and a change in ways of work. Unless this aggressive approach is adopted, however, the personnel officer might sit forever in his isolated cubicle waiting for the opportunity to motivate an inner city adult to start higher education.

The National Association of Student Personnel Administration (N.A.S.P.A.) drew up some position papers for the attention and consideration of their membership. The ones dealing with compensatory education and the student personnel dean and public relations are closely related to the problems of making higher education available to inner city adults.

The intention of NASPA to make higher education available to inner city adults is evident. The difficulty is that compensatory

education (non-credit, remedial courses, "general college" programs and other plans in which the purpose is to compensate for imposed inadequacies in education) is unattractive to the inner city adult. It labels him "deficient." Most programs of this sort require full-time involvement, a luxury that inner city residents cannot afford.

The NASPA is clear and positive as to its intent to achieve better communications between the university and <u>all</u> segments of the community. The fact that the NASPA submits the goal of better communication to <u>all</u> segments of the community, as a position paper for membership consideration, implies, in my judgement, that such a goal represents a departure from current practice. However, the statement does not provide any enlightment as to how this better communication to <u>all</u> segments is to be achieved. I fear that "the better communication to all-segments-goal" will be adopted, but filed under the "no-action except-in-crisis" category. In a paper presented to the Adult Student Personnel Association, Inc. (A.S.P.A.), I suggested specific ways of improving communication with the inner city adult such as "the university establishing dialogues in factories and union halls; the faculty making presentation to workers and writing non-jargon articles to be published in union newspapers and similar publications."

Barring very few exceptions, free tuition and maintenance grants in significant amounts are not available for inner city adults. It is unrealistic to expect the inner city adults to use some of their hard-earned money (especially in the first year) for tuition or other related expenses to higher education. Unless "financial security" accompanies the invitation to higher education, we are talking nonsense as far as the inner city adult is concerned.

Changes Designed to Make Higher Education Available And Desirable to Inner City Adults

In listing some of the main characteristics of higher education and its relation to inner city adults, some changes have already been suggested which will make higher education available and desirable to inner city adults. In this section, we will be more specific in our suggestions.

The time is past-due for the "talking" stages of change. The implementation phase of change must begin. I am aware of the difficulties or, at times, the impossibilities of expediting change. However, I am suggesting that those people committed to change should best start acting forcefully about their convictions, or stop talking. Change involves the acceptance of risks: personal risks; collective risks and institutional risks. The personnel worker that demands safety and guaranteed success to be built into his design of change is not serious about implementing change. A first question each personnel worker must ask and answer himself is, "How committed am I to change?" "How committed to change is the institution that employs me?" In his answer of these questions, the worker will find the guiding principles to his strategies of change.

Power is a pre-requisite in effecting change. Personnel workers in colleges and universities often have very limited power, or do not recognize the power they do have. My first recommendation, therefore, is that personnel workers examine the degree of power they do have and then go after more. To do this (in the contex of our topic) personnel workers must make alliances and coalitions with others that share their

perception of need to change the institutions they serve in making them more accessable and desirable to the inner city adult. Social action-conscious students and militant-active inner city adult groups are natural places to look for support.

Inner city residents reject the idea of seeking higher education because both they and the college expect failure. To be successful the counselor must begin to present to the community concrete examples of success. These successes among the inner city residents will be the best "recruiters" and public relations officers the college will have in the inner city. Success during the first year an inner city resident attends college is crucial. Some of the things a counselor can do to help the inner city resident achieve success during his first year are: (1) Insure that the student is free of anxieties related to finances; (Is financial assistance provided? Are the payments held up by bureaucratic red tape or inefficiency? Was the assessment of the student financial needs a realistically accurate one? Since most inner city residents have not had the opportunity to budget in long term blocks; monthly grants are better than semester or year grants.) (2) Insure academic success. There is evidence to support the statement that a failure in one course during the first year of college for the inner city resident is often the one responsible for the student dropping out of college. Our experience strongly suggests that the difference between success and failure, learning and not learning (especially for the inner city resident) is directly related to <u>who</u> is teaching a specific course. Therefore, the counselor must know the instructors and courses that optimize the opportunity of

success for the inner city resident and he should share this information with the student. This suggestion lends itself to "sticky problems;" ethical consideration related to counselors judging and and sharing such judgement with students; the competency of individual instructors and the relevancy of specific courses.

Earlier we stated that balckness is the over-riding characteristic of black students. We also stated that the most evident and constant characteristic of the Puerto Rican is his reluctance to commit cultural suicide or yield to cultural genocide. However, the curricula of most institutions are white curricula, white education and therefore they are rejected by many non-white inner city residents. Black studies and ethnic studies could well be used as the content for compensatory education programs giving them two values: (1) their value of legitimate areas of study; (2) their value as helpers in promoting group identity and pride.

Compensatory education is often the door open for admittance of inner city adults to college. Compensatory education as it is predominantly administered, is bound to fail both as a means of encouraging adults to enter college and as a way of preparing them to succeed in college. The non-credit status of such programs is viewed by inner city adults as a waste of time or as an investment leading nowhere. In terms of the "now" orientation that characterizes the inner city adult, such programs are undesirable. In addition, compensatory programs are often administered by the same people who originally failed to teach and motivate those persons in the past. It is no wonder that the "expectancy of failure" is so prevalent in the minds of both teachers and students.